

## **Historic, Archive Document**

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



1.7  
H 57733  
Cop. 1

Food Information Series  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Office of Information  
Washington, 25, D. C.

October 25, 1943

Subject: Facts about Southern Farm Workers who Helped ~~Save~~ Maine Record Potato Crop.

Field distribution: War Board members, Extension Editors, AAA committeemen, SCS Regional Information Chiefs, FDA Regional Marketing Reports Chiefs, BAE Regional Analysts, FSA Regional Information Chiefs, FCA Information Agents.

Suggested use: Background and feature story material.

About 1,600 farm workers from Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and West Virginia, during a slack season on their farms, joined thousands of Maine farm and city workers, 600 Boy Scouts, a few Canadian workers, 300 from Jamaica, about 1,000 soldiers, and other helpers in harvesting the all-time record Maine potato crop.

Crop 70 percent above normal

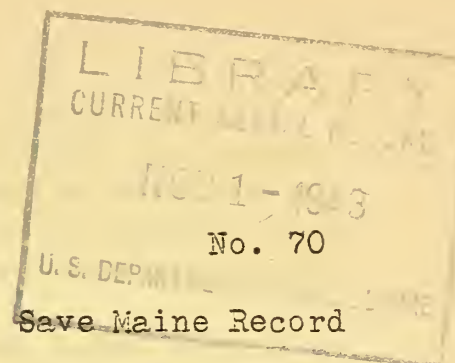
With a big increase in acreage and the record yield of 370 bushels per acre, Maine this year produced 71,000,000 bushels of potatoes, 70 percent more than normal and 15 percent of the entire Nation's crop.

The Maine crop, which stores well, will help feed civilians in at least 30 States, and about 18 percent of the crop is expected to go to the armed forces. About 90 percent of the Maine crop is grown in Aroostock County.

Extra workers are needed to harvest even normal crops. Most of these workers have come each year from Canada and from Maine counties to the south of Aroostock. The harvest problem was serious this year because only a relatively few Canadian workers were available and several thousand Maine workers, including farmers, had gone into the armed services and war industries.

In response to the call for help from Maine, the Southern workers were recruited by the Extension Service of their States, transported to Maine by the Office of Labor of the War Food Administration, and placed on Aroostock County farms by the county agent's office.

On October 21, Aroostock County Agent Verne C. Beverly reported that 90 percent of the crop was harvested, and if there was not a severe freeze or rainy weather within the next 4 or 5 days, the entire record crop would be saved.





### 500 return through Washington

About 500 of the Southern workers, headed home, tired but with money in their pockets and the satisfaction that they had helped do a vital war job, stopped at the Nation's Capital Thursday, October 21, where they saw Congress in action and were congratulated by more than a dozen prominent Senators, Congressmen, and War Food Administration officials.

In a short ceremony on the Capitol steps, Senator Ralph O. Brewster, Senator W. H. White, and Congressman Frank Fellows, of Maine, expressed to the group the profound thanks of the people of Maine for the help given in saving this vital war food crop.

Greeting the group from their home States were Senator Alben W. Barkley, Congressmen A. J. May, and John M. Robsion, of Kentucky; Senator Elmer Thomas and Congressman W. E. Disney, of Oklahoma; Senator H. M. Kilgore, of West Virginia; Senator Hattie W. Caraway and Senator J. L. McClellan, of Arkansas; and Senator John Thomas from Idaho.

Speaking for the group, Senator Barkley congratulated the workers for the patriotic war job they had done in Maine at a time when work on their farms was slack.

War Food Administrator Marvin Jones accepted from the group a bushel of potatoes, sent by Governor Sumner Sewall of Maine, and presented by Mrs. Alice Davis, 71-year-old widow from Lovely, Ky., who picked an average of 55 barrels of potatoes a day.

Jones congratulated the farmers, including the Maine potato growers, for this year's tremendous food production and told the Southern workers that the way they had helped harvest Maine's bumper potato crop was a splendid example of the kind of teamwork that brings victory. "Nothing is more important than food," he explained. "It is as essential as the air we breathe. Right now, it is more important than ever because it is a weapon of war."

Col. Philip Bruton, Director of Labor in the War Food Administration, likened the returning workers' stop-over at the Capital to a celebration of a victory.

### Potatoes by the carload

Forty-two workers in the group visiting the Capital picked over 1,000 barrels of potatoes each during their stay in Maine of about a month. John Waterman, Decatur, Ark., topped the group by picking 2,016 barrels, about 8 carloads of potatoes--enough to provide over 1,300 people with as many potatoes as the average person eats in a year. Though he had never picked potatoes before, he picked 116 barrels in one day.

Clifford Shotwell, Versailles, Ky., who loaded potatoes picked up by other workers, loaded 20,800 barrels during his month's work in Maine.

It was "Pass the potato baskets. We've gotta save this food" for the Rev. Bell Polly, United Baptist Minister, and his 16-year old daughter Wynema, from Hindman, Ky. In addition to holding prayer meetings, Rev. Mr. Polly picked 1,240 barrels.

Many entire families were in the group. Among them, Sam Hensley, Warfield, Ky., his wife, and two sons, 14 and 15 years old. During the month they picked enough potatoes to take home \$400 above board and other expenses. Christopher Wiese, Spavinaw, Okla., saved over 2,000 barrels of potatoes and headed home with \$228 clear.

Typical of the comments by Maine farmers was one by LeRoy Thompson, Limestone, Me. He said the 10 Arkansas and Kentucky boys on his farm were "very smart boys and I was well satisfied. Wish I could have kept them longer." Thompson's 2-row potato digger broke down. He could not get repair parts so he and the crew had to do the best they could with the other digger. One of the boys got sick, and Mrs. Thompson took him to her home and cared for him. She would expect anyone else to do as much for her boy, she said.

Most of the Southern farmers were anxious to get back home. Many of them had put their tobacco in the barns and picked potatoes while it was curing for 6 weeks. They would start stripping the leaves off as soon as they got home.

Typical of others who wanted to get back was A. E. Moore, Hulbert, Okla., who was wanted to help his brother-in-law harvest 60 acres of peanuts which he knew "the Government wanted grown."

With the crop about harvested potatoes seem to be stored almost everywhere. Some of the Southern workers helped farmers build storage houses. Many potatoes are being stored in pits on the side of hills, dug by the State highway department.

The average person eats about 3 bushels of potatoes a year. Maine potatoes store well, and the War Food Administration is urging consumers to store at least a bushel now for later use to help relieve the storage problem, and to be sure no potatoes go to waste for lack of storage.

